

committee. Very extended consideration was given to this issue, which of course, comports with its importance. This is a major step we all need to recognize and the fact that it will happen without controversy, at least of any consequence, ought not to make us lose sight of the fact of the historic nature of what is being accomplished here—to-morrow, presumably.

I thank the Senator for his skilled leadership on this issue.

Mr. LUGAR. I thank the distinguished Senator from Maryland for his leadership in our committee throughout the years and, likewise, specifically, on the issue of NATO that has been before the Senate.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. LUGAR. I ask unanimous consent the Senate now begin a period of morning business with Senators permitted to speak up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. LUGAR. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. CORZINE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

FAIRNESS AND RESPONSIBILITY IN POLITICAL LIFE

Mr. CORZINE. Mr. President, I rise today to speak to an issue of fairness and responsibility in our political life that demands our attention.

Let me premise my remarks by saying it is an honor to be a Senator and serve the people of New Jersey. I love my job. I love politics and the debate of ideas it makes possible. But I must say that I am downright disgusted when that debate of ideas degenerates into the politics of personal destruction and moves toward character assassination, especially when it may run afoul of the laws passed by this body, and more especially when the target of a campaign of personal destruction is a good and decent man—TOM DASCHLE, who has spent his entire adult life in service to our Nation.

A little over 1 year ago, the Congress passed—and the President signed—the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002.

Even as the courts ponder a challenge and an appeal to this landmark legislation, there are those involved in the political process that have demonstrated their intent to disregard it no matter what the court decides for the sole purpose of destroying a political opponent.

In that regard, there are very disturbing reports in the media this week about an amorphous front group being formed in South Dakota for the pur-

pose, in the words of its organizers, of ending TOM DASCHLE's public career in 2004.

I don't question anyone's right to free speech nor their right to mount a campaign against any candidate for Federal Office, but this effort would apparently violate both Federal tax and election laws.

According to press reports, associates of the presumptive Republican nominee for Senate in South Dakota have begun raising special interest money in Washington for an advertising campaign in South Dakota against Senator DASCHLE, a campaign only marginally distanced from Senator DASCHLE's potential competitor or the opposing political party.

The problem with this effort, leaving aside the elements of personal destruction, is that the organization leading it—the Rushmore Policy Council—is organized as a tax-exempt 501(c)(4) non-profit organization.

According to the IRS, 501(c)(4) organizations "must be operated exclusively for the promotion of social welfare." The IRS also stipulates that, "the promotion of social welfare does not include direct or indirect participation or intervention in political campaigns on behalf of or in opposition to any candidate for public office."

One might say a lot of things about TOM DASCHLE, but his election or defeat is hardly social welfare. It is clear from their own statements that the purpose of the Rushmore Policy Council is to defeat Senator DASCHLE. In short, this is likely a violation of the letter of the law and clearly a violation of its spirit.

The Congress attempted to address these types of advertisements in the campaign finance reform law passed last year. But one of the organizers of the effort against Senator DASCHLE stated simply that, "We're going to operate as if it's not" on the books.

In addition to the personal attacks and legal questions are the implications of a smear campaign that constructs front groups to infiltrate a Senator's home State with reckless disregard for the spirit of the campaign finance laws that this body passed just last year with bipartisan support.

At the very least, this is a mockery of Congress's efforts to clean up electoral politics.

Let me quote from the memo distributed around Washington by the organizers of the Rushmore Council's so-called Daschle Accountability Project: "We propose to destroy Daschle's credibility" and "ultimately end his political career . . ."

Unbelievably, the group funding this covert operation intends to employ South Dakotans who have almost nothing to do with the campaign, but who help to convey the false impression that the campaign is, and I quote, "putatively based in South Dakota—to avoid the dismissive 'outsider' label routinely attached to such efforts in the past."

In other words, the group exists to put a phony local veneer on the GOP's efforts to ruin its number one target—TOM DASCHLE. Or as this particular group puts it, ". . . maybe be rid of [Tom Daschle] once and for all."

This is the work of the Rushmore Policy Council, an organization so small it has no website or local telephone listing. Its offshoot "The Daschle Accountability Project" is a proudly self-described coalition of right wing organizations whose stated purpose, according to its own mission statement, is not to engage in policy debate, but rather to end Daschle's career by running an \$800,000 advertising campaign in South Dakota designed to "destroy DASCHLE's credibility within his home state through humor"—as if a laugh track makes them any less unseemly.

The Rapid City Journal recently cited leaders of campaign finance watchdog groups who have already pointed out that the Rushmore Policy Council is endangering its tax-exempt status by targeting DASCHLE for defeat in 2004. "It's not clear to me how they will remain a 501c4—an organization that must operate exclusively for the promotion of social welfare—as they are going to do what is being reported."

And, Fred Wertheimer, president of the campaign finance reform group Democracy 21 agrees with this assessment. He tells the Journal "The group's activities need to be carefully watched in the coming months to see if, in fact, they are breaking tax laws and campaign-finance laws. It is clear they want to defeat Senator DASCHLE . . . there doesn't seem to be any question they want to use this for this goal and that purpose . . . and that—is not what this group—is supposed to engage in."

Most disturbingly is that this type of attack is hardly new. About a year and a half ago, the White House asked its political allies to turn up the heat on Senator DASCHLE. Most of us know the routine—the orchestrated campaign to tar TOM with the label "obstructionist." Even while under his leadership the Senate approved 100 judicial appointments and rejected only two—some obstructionist.

Where I come from, 100 is hardly obstructionist.

After the White House's directive, the outrageous attacks began. Since then, political opponents have compared Senator DASCHLE to everyone from Saddam Hussein to the devil himself on talk radio.

The problem this "Burn Down Daschle" effort faces is two fold: No. 1, lack of credibility; and, No. 2, lack of legal authority.

On the former, the Sioux Falls Argus Leader accurately points out that the Daschle Accountability project and its efforts to destroy DASCHLE's character through an ad campaign with a ridiculing tone embedded in humor have the potential to backfire in a small State where retail politics holds great sway.